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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED TEXT TO ALL PARAGRAPHS)

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SUBJECT: FM FASSI FIHRI REPORTS THE ARAB LEAGUE MINISTERS
SPLIT ON LEBANON

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a March 7 meeting with visiting Ambassador Swing, otherwise devoted to thanking Morocco for its support in his quest to lead the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri shared some impressions of the Cairo Arab League Ministerial, whence he had just returned. The Foreign Minister noted that the Arab ministers couldn't agree on anything except that they should continue to try to reach some agreement before the planned Damascus summit at the end of the month. He had never seen so divided the Saudis and the Syrians (who showed the influence of the Iranian hand). Absent agreement, he expected that the members would attend the summit, but not at a high level. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador William Swing, accompanied by PolCouns, called on Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri on March 7 to thank him for the GOM commitment, received earlier in the week to support Swing's candidacy to lead the IOM. The meeting, arranged at the last minute also included Secretary General Omar Hilale and the FM's Chief of Staff Nasser Bourita. In addition to discussing IOM and its future, Swing, recently departed head of the UN Mission to the Congo, appreciated the significant contribution Moroccan troops had made to UN peacekeeping in the DRC.

¶3. (C) Discussion then moved to the Arab League and the Cairo Ministerial. The Minister said the Ministerial was split with Syria having the backing of Algeria and Qatar. Kuwait and Bahrain seemed to waiver, showing the effects of the Iranian hand, which was even more evident with Syria's case. Morocco was on the other side with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. At bottom, the GOM believes a sensible solution to the Lebanon crisis would be a phased approach: First vote in a president; second, empower the president to form a coalition national unity government; third, with the government in place, amend the election laws to avoid future crises. It is only a sitting President who can arrange credible guarantees for Lebanon's insecure Christian and Shi'a minorities. Morocco had proposed this phasing, he said. In contrast, the Syrians wanted a package that would lay out all the elements of the coalition government and future arrangements before they would agree to a president. Fassi Fihri did not think that was practical.

¶4. (C) Fassi Fihri said a successful Arab League summit now looked unlikely, but the Arab states will continue to try to find a workable compromise. He was certain the Saudis would not attend at any serious level. He had never seen the Saudis and the Syrians so divided. The Saudis and the Moroccans were upset about the Syrian invitation to Ahmedinejad. What place did he have at an Arab League summit? The Minister said King Mohammed VI in any case would not attend the summit,

(swearing us to secrecy on this), but adding that the actual level of attendance would depend on ongoing negotiations. He remained interested in U.S. views. PolCouns noted that we generally shared the GOM's unhappiness, and did not see how a summit level meeting could be productive under current circumstances. Fassi Fihri said he would welcome being updated on our thinking, including by phone. He planned to spend the week of March 10 in Dakar at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) ministerial prepcom and summit.

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Riley